

## WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,

to remind us of God's presence with us,

and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .

There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own browser.

It's not our usual day for it,

but we will also celebrate Holy Communion together today and all are welcome at the Lord's Table.

So you may wish to gather the elements: some bread, a cracker or cookie, even some cake or pie,

and something to drink such as wine, juice, or water.

I'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements underneath.

## GATHERING MUSIC

"Room at the Table" - Carrie Newcomer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Plf7nD6HJ0>

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life is a church with full real life standing in the Eastern Association; Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC).

And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a UCC church, we'd like you to know that

"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder in the back.

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry

there is a donation bowl in the back,

or you can go to our website

[firstuccsl.org](http://firstuccsl.org)

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,

as a community,

join our hearts together,

to connect to God and to each other.

So this time is the essence of what we do here together.

If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,

and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at this time.

As people share their prayers in text  
please read them prayerfully  
and hold this space as sacred and safe  
to open our hearts to God.  
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.  
Those voiced here today.  
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.  
Those for which we have no words.  
We lift them all to you, O Lord,  
with faith in your boundless love and grace.  
We pray in the name of the one calls us into life,  
and joins our hearts and voices in the prayer he taught us saying,  
Our Father who art in heaven  
hallowed by Thy name.  
Thy kin-dom come, Thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us..  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil,  
for Thine is the kin-dom, and the power, and the glory forever.  
Amen.

#### PRAYER RESPONSE

"In this Very Room"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcTfcpabYK8>

#### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

Our lectionary Gospel reading for today comes from the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel according to John.

It is the well-known story of the raising of Lazarus.

The story itself is 45 verses long,

I've cut it down to focus on the part of the story that calls to me today.

But before we get to that I need to remind you that one Sunday several months ago, I played a video of a sermon by Diana Butler Bass

Where she outlined the very recent scholarship about this passage that has rocked our understanding of Jesus' ministry and the early church.

It starts with the first line of this story:

"Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. . . ."

The work of Libbie Schrader, currently of Duke Divinity School, has shown that the earliest manuscripts we have of this passage don't say "Martha,"

They say "Mary"

Actually they say:

"Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary, and his sister, Mary."

So this is not the same Mary and Martha as in the story in Luke where Mary sitting

at the feet of Jesus and Martha is cooking.  
Those sisters didn't have a brother, and they lived in a whole different town.  
Libbie has also shown that one of these Marys was Mary Magdalene,  
And as Peter was "the Rock," Mary was "the Tower,"  
And both were the foundations of the early church.  
If you weren't here to listen to Diana's sermon, and I'm rocking your world right now,  
I recommend you Google Diana Butler Bass and Mary the Tower  
And listen to or read her sermon.  
For now, if you could just hold that information lightly,  
Because that's not where my focus is today.  
Let us listen to John, chapter 11, verses 17

JOHN 11:17-45 (NRSVUE)

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus[e] had already been in the tomb four days.

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away,  
and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

Martha said to Jesus,

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

Jesus said to her, "

Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him, "

I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her,

"I am the resurrection and the life.

Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,  
and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this?"

She said to him,

"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,[g] the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately,

"The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out.

They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him,  
"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping,  
he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

He said, "Where have you laid him?"  
They said to him,  
"Lord, come and see."  
Jesus began to weep.  
So the Jews said,  
"See how he loved him!"  
But some of them said,  
"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"  
Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb.  
It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.  
Jesus said,  
"Take away the stone."  
Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him,  
"Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."  
Jesus said to her,  
"Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"  
So they took away the stone.  
And Jesus looked upward and said,  
"Father, I thank you for having heard me.  
I knew that you always hear me,  
but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here,  
so that they may believe that you sent me."  
When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice,  
"Lazarus, come out!"  
The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth.  
Jesus said to them,  
"Unbind him, and let him go."

The Word of God for the People of God.  
Thanks be to God.

"Gather Us In" – by Marty Haughen, performed by Highland Baptist Church  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nh-7hApC4iQ>

"All Are Welcome"

Let us pray ...  
During Lent, I've been talking about compassion,  
Or more specifically,  
The Compassion Practice as described by Dr. Frank Rogers,  
Based on the Way of Jesus,  
And about how that informs our discernment about how God is calling us to be the church,  
As this is part of a class project for me, you are helping me as we help our church.  
We've talked about how the Compassion Practice invites us to take our "PULSE"  
An acronym for how to connect to our heart and the hearts of others,  
"P" stands for "paying attention"  
"U" standing for "understanding with empathy"  
"L" stands for "loving with connection"

“S” stands for “sensing the sacred”

Today, as we look at the story of the Jesus and Lazarus, I want to focus on the “E”

“E” stands for “embodying new life”

Let’s see how that unfolds in this story.

Jesus learns that his friend, Lazarus is deathly ill and travels to Bethany to find that Lazarus has already been dead four days and has been laid in his tomb.

First, he greets Martha – er – Mary Magdalene

And they have a lovely, very Gospel of John-like conversation

Where Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life,” etc.

And then the other Mary comes out to greet him,

Along with friends who were sitting with her,

And Jesus sees her,

Sees that she is weeping,

And sees her friends weeping with her.

He pays attention.

And, the text tells us, he is “deeply moved and troubled”

He understands and empathizes with them,

His heart is engaged.

At this point, I feel a shift in the story.

When Jesus first heard that Lazarus was dying,

His response seems kind of callous,

Especially since we are told Jesus loved Lazarus.

He doesn’t rush to Lazarus’s side,

He waits two days,

Apparently for dramatic effect,

And he says all sorts of things like the whole thing will be for God’s glory.

But when he sees Mary and the others crying,

When he is touched by the depths of their sorrow,

The story shifts, and Jesus speaks tenderly to the grieving Mary and he grieves with her.

“Jesus began to weep” it says.

“Began” to weep, like that was only the start.

In my imagination, that means that Jesus wept throughout the rest of this story,

Tears falling as he invites the sacred into this situation in prayer.

After which, it seems he knows what he has to do:

Tears falling as he calls Lazarus to come out into the light,

Into new life,

Tears falling as he commands those around him to “unbind him and let him go.”

In this story, Jesus doesn’t just feel love and compassion,

He embodies it and acts out of it

To bring healing and restoration,

New life.

As Dr. Rogers writes:

“We have not cultivated compassion when we simply experience feelings of warm regard towards ourselves or others.”

That’s just sentimentality.

“We must act out our compassion in ways that ease suffering and promote the flourishing of others.”

That could mean things like “consoling the grief-stricken,”  
As Jesus did with Mary, or Marys plural,  
Or “tending the wounded,”  
As Jesus did with Lazarus,  
Or “befriending the forsaken.”  
“But,” Dr. Rogers notes, “acting out of genuine compassion often requires careful discernment.  
What does compassion look like, for example, when the wound caused by another is still fresh,  
Or when an offender refuses to curb his or her violence,”  
Of words or actions,  
“and remains unrepentant?”  
When we have been wounded, “compassion does not invite us to minimize our own needs for healing and wholeness,”  
Compassion does not ask us to “silence our voices abandon our personal power,  
Or lose ourselves in caretaking” for others.  
And those who wound others must be held responsible for their conduct.  
But compassion “does seek the ember of humanity in even the most violent of offenders.”  
Yet we also know that “acts of compassion restore the people moved to embody them”  
“Taking time to care for another replenishes the pulse of our spirits as well.”  
“And it deepens our connection to God’s Spirit of life that renews us and sustains our hope.”  
I wonder how it felt to be there that day Lazarus stumbled out of his tomb,  
To be one of the ones who helped get the funeral bindings off of him.  
I bet it felt amazing, and confusing, and hopeful all at once.  
I imagine they lived off that feeling for the rest of their lives.  
I bet they all wept.

Jesus modeled the need to discern the appropriate compassionate actions to take when he paused at the threshold of the opened tomb,  
And opened himself to the sacred in prayer.  
For me, it’s significant that it is only after that prayer that Jesus spoke the words of healing and restoration,  
“Lazarus come out” and “unbind him.”  
It is through connecting to that sacred presence that Jesus could embody new life,  
And enable Lazarus to be restored to his family, his community, to life.

What does “embodying new life” mean in the context of our ongoing discernment as a church?  
I went through all the responses to the first set of survey questions we looked at to take the PULSE of First UCC SL.  
The results were crystal clear that we have consensus about our core values as a church, which are key to our mission and vision:  
Welcome, acceptance, and inclusiveness  
Connection and community  
Love, sharing God’s love  
This is our most authentic, our best self as a church.  
And what compassion does is it grounds us in who we really are.  
So the next step in our discernment must be to ask what do these core values require

of us right now?

In what ways are we being called to embody new life – for ourselves and others?

What “tombs” need to be opened?

What might be binding or constricting us, keeping us from moving into new life?

What are the compassionate, restorative actions we can take in our context?

Context is important.

No church can be all things to all people,

Any more than any one individual can.

So we always need to discern what is ours to do, at this time and in this place.

So I have a second survey to reflect on that some more.

As before, it will also be sent out as a notecard to the First UCC SL group list.

But also as before, I now invite you into a space of contemplative discernment,

As we open ourselves up to God in prayer.

We’ll have about a minute quietly meditating on our core values to ground us,

Let’s take a deep breath in, long slow breath out.

Once more

Listen to these words as you continue to breathe softly.

Say each word to yourself so that you breathe these words in and out.

Welcome.

Breathe in Welcome,

Breathe out welcome.

Acceptance,

Breathe in acceptance.

Breathe out acceptance.

Inclusiveness

Breathe in inclusiveness.

Breathe out inclusiveness.

Connection

Breathe in connection

Breathe out connection

Community

Breathe in community

Breathe out community

Love.

Breathe in love

Breathe out love

[pause for quiet meditation about 1 minute]

As I ask my new questions, pay attention to what is rising in you, and share it in local chat.

--if you are new to First UCC SL, I ask you to hold our church in prayer in this time.

--But if a response to these questions rises in you during prayer, you are also welcome to share that in text.

As you listen deep inside for what rises in you in response to these questions, don’t worry if you are not sure you understand the question,

Respond based on however the question makes sense to you.

You don’t need to have the “answers”

Don’t worry if what arises doesn’t seem clear, or practical,

Just notice what comes to your mind and share that.

Trust that the Spirit can and will speak through us as a group,

Because where two or three are gathered, God is here.

And we are the body of Christ.

Here is the first question:

1. Who are we at First UCC SL called to serve today?

This doesn't mean we won't serve others, but who should be our focus at this time?

They could be inworld or in real life or both.

Right now, who most needs our welcome, our acceptance, our community, our love?

[pause to type responses in chat]

Next question:

2. What do we, gathered here at First UCC SL, need more of? What do you feel we need more of?

[pause to type responses in chat]

Next question:

3. What can we do together as First UCC SL that none of us can do alone?

[pause to type responses in chat]

Last question:

4. What do we at First UCC SL need to let go of so that we can embody new life?

[pause to type responses in chat]

Thank you for your prayer and your sharing.

If something else comes to you later, you are welcome to return the notecard survey to add that.

Embodying new life isn't easy.

There are stones that need to be rolled away.

Jesus called Lazarus by name to come out into the light of day,

But Jesus didn't go into the tomb to get him,

Lazarus had to take those first steps himself,

Even then he still needed help to get the bindings off.

And something always has to die before something new can be born.

To get to spring, we have to go through winter.

Even then, Parker Palmer reminds us that Spring is as much about mud as it is about blooming flowers.

Healing, restoration, they aren't easy either.

To get to the joy Easter, we have to experience the pain of Good Friday.

I wonder what new life, what healing, looked like for Lazarus?

I like to imagine it looked like a celebration dinner with his family and friends

To welcome Lazarus home.

Home where there was room at the table for everyone.

Sharing the wine of compassion, and the bread of new birth,

In the words of our last song.

Which is why now, though it is not our regular day for it,

I invite you to gather the communion elements,

Hold them in your hand,

Feel their weight.

They are real and tangible,

As real and tangible as the bread and drink shared that long ago night in an upper room,

With Jesus and his closest friends.

I wonder if Jesus sat at that table,

Looking at the faces around him,



And remembered when he wept outside of Lazarus's tomb,  
When he saw and knew and experienced for himself  
the grief of losing someone loved, as Lazarus was loved,  
as those sitting at that last supper loved Jesus himself,  
Maybe, just maybe, that was where he got the idea to give them something,  
Something tangible,  
Like bread and wine,  
A ritual way to hold onto him and to each other,  
A way to anchor themselves in memory and community.  
To re-member.  
Jesus, knowing the pain that was to come for them,  
And loving them all,  
Blessed the bread, broke it,  
And then gave them what they needed,  
To hold them as a community until they too could experience new life.  
This is my body, he said, take, eat, remember me.  
Let us eat this bread of new birth together.  
[pause to eat the bread]  
And then he took a cup and shared it, saying, drink, and as often as you drink,  
remember me.  
Let us drink this cup of compassion together.  
[pause to drink]  
And let us give thanks for Jesus who calls us all to rise up,  
Come out into the light,  
Who helps unbind us,  
And makes us all welcome.  
Amen.

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over  
Our ministry to the world is just beginning.  
The world is waiting  
for us to roll the stones away  
rise up  
step into the light  
and embody compassion in the world  
that all may rise up  
Go in peace  
come again in hope.  
Amen.

"Rise Up" - The Many

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPUineyWWdk>